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OUR READERS

SAVAGE LOVE

CHEATS
BY DAN SAVAGE



I'm a guy, 35, and a cheating piece of shit. I'm engaged to a woman I love, but earlier this year I cheated on her. I have no excuse. She discovered the dating app I used, and we worked through that. But she doesn't know that shortly after her discovery, I went ahead and cheated. To my meager, meager credit, I did seek out only women who were looking for NSA hookups. But I quickly came to realize how big of a mistake this was, how much I love my fiancée, and that I'm a shitty person. I see a therapist, and he advised that, if I'm certain this was a one-time thing, and if I'm convinced that I'm happy with my fiancée, I should keep quiet. I shouldn't burden my fiancée with this knowledge. I'm inclined to agree but, dear God, the guilt. I feel like I'm not the person my fiancée thought I was. What do I do? Should I just accept this as a lesson learned and keep it to myself? Perhaps there's selfishness at play here, since I'm trying to make myself feel better, but I'm struggling.

Can't Personally Overlook Selfishness

I'm with your therapist, CPDS—and, hey, it's nice to see “keep your mouth shut about a one-time infidelity” make the jump from our finer advice columns (Dear Prudence, Dear Sugar, Savage Love) to some of our actual therapists.

While honesty (best policy) and confession (good for the soul) get all the positive press, there are times when unburdening yourself is absolutely the wrong thing to do. The person who confesses may wind up feeling better—because at least now they're being *honest*—but the person to whom they've confessed can wind up feeling a whole lot worse. Some burdens should be borne not shifted. If your fiancée is going to inevitably find out, CPDS, better she find out about it from you. But *if* the secret can be kept and *if* living with the guilt motivates you not to cheat again, *then* you can keep your mouth shut with a semi-clear-ish conscience.

This advice is not a license for serial adulterers. If you can't be faithful to someone—if that's what you discovered when you had the affair—then you should extract yourself from the monogamous commitment you've already made to your fiancée and refrain from making monogamous commitments to anyone else in the future. But if you honestly believe you can be faithful, CPDS, you don't have to see yourself as a cheating piece of shit. A serial adulterer/betrayer/liar is a cheating piece of shit; someone who cheated once, regrets it, and makes a good-faith, multi-decade effort not to do it again is a fallible human being.

My boyfriend of five years is a sweet, smart, handsome, loving, supportive, middle-aged, chubby white guy. We have a fulfilling sex life. When we first met, he shared a fantasy he had about watching me get fucked by a black guy. (He knows it's not something I'm interested in IRL.) I've caught him several times posing online as a young, buff, handsome black guy looking for a “snowbunny.” I call him out on it every time, and it causes huge fights. He says he'll stop, but he never does. Weighed against all his other good qualities, this isn't that big of a deal. Clearly he's not going to meet up with the women he's chatting with. What makes me sad is that I adore him as he is—I love his big white belly, his bald head, and his rosy cheeks. I think I do a good job of communicating this to him. I guess I'm writing to you for some reassurance that I'm doing the right thing by letting this behavior go and also for some insight into why he's doing it in the first place.

Upset Girlfriend Hates Eroticized Racial Secrets

If this isn't that big of a deal, UGHES, why are you calling him out on it? Why are you monitoring his online activities/fantasies at all?

What your boyfriend is doing sounds relatively harmless—he's pretending to be someone he's not while flirting with other people online who are most likely pretending to be someone they're not. (I promise you most of the “snowbunnies” he's chatted with were other men.) The world is full of people who enjoy pretending to be someone they're not, from cosplayers pretending to be Captain America or Poison Ivy to creative anachronists pretending to be knights and ladies to Donald Trump Jr. pretending to be a human being.

We can't gloss over the racial/racist cultural forces that shaped your boyfriend's kinks, of course, but it's possible to explore those kinds of fantasies online or IRL without being a racist piece of shit. And a person can pretend to be someone of another race online—because it turns them on—without injecting racial hate into online spaces and/or thoughtlessly reinforcing damaging stereotypes about people of other races. You've seen your boyfriend's online chats, UGHES, so you're in a better position to judge whether he's exploring his fantasies without making the world a worse place than it already is for actual black men.

If he's being a racist piece of shit online, UGHES, call him out on that. If he isn't, stop policing his fantasies.

I am a 36-year-old Italian straight man. I love my girlfriend endlessly. One month ago, she told me she has thoughts about missing out on the things she didn't get to do in her teens. She is 29 years old now. Also, she says she feels only a mild love for me now and is curious about other men. Yesterday we met and cried and talked and made love and it felt like she still loves me passionately. But she also told me she had sex with a stranger a week ago and she is going for one and a half months to Los Angeles on her own. Now I feel confused. I should hate her for what she did to me, I should tell her to fuck off, but I can't do it. I am so in love and I want to be together again after her trip. How do I exit this turmoil?

Pensive And Insecure Now

You exit this turmoil by breaking up with your girlfriend.

She wants to get out there and do “things she didn't get to do in her teens,” i.e., fuck other guys and most likely date other guys. This isn't what you want, PAIN, you've made that clear to her, but she's gonna fuck other guys anyway. You don't have to pretend to hate her, PAIN, and you don't have to tell her to fuck off. But you do have to tell her that it's over—at least for now.

And once she goes, PAIN, don't lie around tormenting yourself with mental images of all the things/men she's doing in Los Angeles. Don't put your life on hold—love life included—while she's gone. You're going to be *single*. So get out there, date other women, do some things/women you haven't done. If she wants to get back together when she returns, and if you still want to get back together with her, you can pick things up where you left off.

But you should act like it's over while she's gone, PAIN, because it most likely is.

On the Lovecast, Cheryl Strayed schools Dan on hiking sex: savagelovecast.com.

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